Educated Citizenry/ Critical Information Literacy

Students will learn to assess, produce, and communicate knowledge as informed and responsible citizens, and learn to critically evaluate the sociopolitical structures that influence information creation.

Critical Information Literacy Definitions from the Literature

In the classroom, a critical [information literacy] would entail a move away from the demonstration of technical search processes and simplistic claims that certain sources are "authoritative" because authorities have decided they are. It would embrace a collective questioning of how information is constructed, disseminated, and understood (Cope, 2010, p. 25).

Critical information literacy differs from standard definitions of information literacy (ex: the ability to find, use, and analyze information) in that it takes into consideration the social, political, economic, and corporate systems that have power and influence over information production, dissemination, access, and consumption (Gregory & Higgins, 2013).

Critical information literacy is an approach to IL that acknowledges and emboldens the learner's agency in the educational process. It is a teaching perspective that does not focus on student acquisition of skills, as information literacy definitions and standards consistently do, and instead encourages a critical and discursive approach to information (Simmons, 2005). (as cited in Tewell, 2015, Decade of Critical Information Literacy, Communications in Libraries)

Critical information literacy (CIL) is a theory and practice that considers the sociopolitical dimensions of information and production of knowledge, and critiques the ways in

which systems of power shape the creation, distribution, and reception of information […] In many ways, critical information literacy can be seen as an approach to information literacy informed by critical theory, and oftentimes critical pedagogy. CIL ultimately seeks to identify and take action upon forms of oppression and proposes to undertake this work by engaging with local communities. (Drabinski & Tewell, 2019)

Information work is economic and political action. This approach requires a focus not on logic, but on ideology, which is the use of meaning in the service of power. Information 'problem solving' emphasiszes processes in individual students' heads,whilst a critical information literacy would broaden analysis to socio political ideologies embedded within economies of ideas and information (Kapitzke, 2003).

A central tenet of critical pedagogy is the concept that extant social power relationships act to construct social reality in particular ways that limit the parameters of debate and prevent certain questions from being raised. A critical theory of [information literacy] - informed by the insights of critical pedagogy-maintains that the development of students' capacity to pose thoughtful questions (as opposed to clear answers) is as important as their ability to locate, access, organize, evaluate, and apply information in the research process (Cope, 2010, p.13).

Most discussions of [information literacy (IL)] stress the development of applied skills that assume a rational, unconstrained information-seeking agent operating in an environment free of social hierarchies. A critical IL will see information-seeking as situated within particular contexts (relationships to power determined by social characteristics such as class, ethnicity, gender, etc.) and in particular societies with their attendant constraints, pressures, and structures (Cope, 2010, p.15)

Critical information is not just the message itself, but also the context in which it is transmitted and understood. It recognizes the its socially constructed nature and the political and cultural implications that come with it (Critten, 2016, p. 2)

[Critical Librarianship] seeks to be transformative, empowering, and a direct challenge to power and privilege (Garcia, 2015) (as cited in Ferretti (2020) Building a Critical Culture: How Critical Librarianship Falls Short in the Workplace)

"At its core, critical information literacy is an attempt to render visible the complex workings of information so that we may identify and act upon the power structures that shape our lives." (Tewell, 2016)

[C]ritical pedagogy engag[es] in the theory and practice (or praxis) of inclusive and reflective teaching in order to broaden students' understanding of power structures within the education system and in society. (Pagowsky & McElroy 2016).

CIL, Simmons (2005) explains, involves increasing student independence and agency, both "[h]elping students to examine and question the social, economic, and political context for the production and consumption of information" and "facilitating students' understanding that they can be participants in scholarly conversations" so that they "think of research not as a task of collecting information but instead as a task of constructing meaning" (p. 299). (Simmons as cited in Torrell 2020)

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